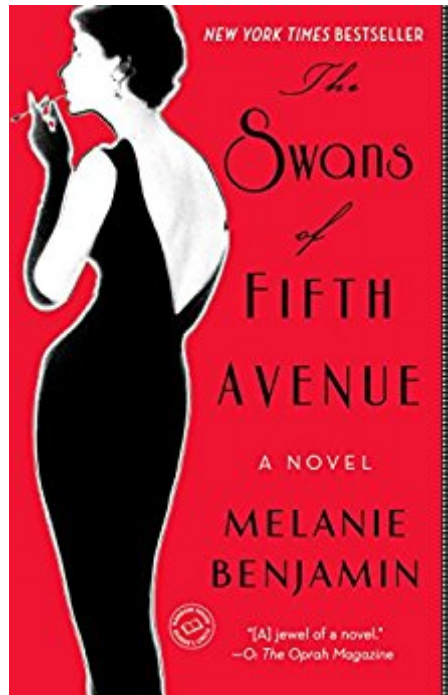


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# The Swans Of Fifth Avenue: A Novel



## Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • The author of *The Aviator*'s Wife returns with a triumphant new novel about New York's "Swans" of the 1950s and the scandalous, headline-making, and enthralling friendship between literary legend Truman Capote and peerless socialite Babe Paley. People's Book of the Week • USA Today's #1 • New and Noteworthy • Book • Entertainment Weekly's Must List • LibraryReads Top Ten Pick Of all the glamorous stars of New York high society, none blazes brighter than Babe Paley. Her flawless face regularly graces the pages of *Vogue*, and she is celebrated and adored for her ineffable style and exquisite taste, especially among her friends—the alluring socialite Swans Slim Keith, C. Z. Guest, Gloria Guinness, and Pamela Churchill. By all appearances, Babe has it all: money, beauty, glamour, jewels, influential friends, a prestigious husband, and gorgeous homes. But beneath this elegantly composed exterior dwells a passionate woman—a woman desperately longing for true love and connection. Enter Truman Capote. This diminutive golden-haired genius with a larger-than-life personality explodes onto the scene, setting Babe and her circle of Swans aflutter. Through Babe, Truman gains an unlikely entrée into the enviable lives of Manhattan's elite, along with unparalleled access to the scandal and gossip of Babe's powerful circle. Sure of the loyalty of the man she calls "True Heart," Babe never imagines the destruction Truman will leave in his wake. But once a storyteller, always a storyteller—even when the stories aren't his to tell. Truman's fame is at its peak when such notable celebrities as Frank and Mia Sinatra, Lauren Bacall, and Rose Kennedy converge on his glittering Black and White Ball. But all too soon, he ignites a literary scandal whose repercussions echo through the years. The Swans of Fifth Avenue will seduce and startle readers as it opens the door onto one of America's most sumptuous eras. Praise for *The Swans of Fifth Avenue* • "Exceptional storytelling . . . teeming with scandal, gossip and excitement." • "Harper's Bazaar • This moving fictionalization brings the whole cast of characters back to vivid life. Gossipy and fun, it's also a nuanced look at the beauty and cruelty of a rarefied, bygone world." • "People • The era and the sordid details come back to life in this jewel of a novel." • "O: The Oprah Magazine • A catty, juicy read that's like a three-martini lunch." • "USA Today • [Captures] the mesmerizing sparkle and scandal of New York high society in the 1950s." • "Chicago Tribune • Tantalizing . . . Readers will fall into a world of glitz, glamour and the exciting life of the rich and famous. The details and conversations are so rich, you may forget you're reading a novel." • "Associated Press • Highly entertaining." • "The Washington Post • Take Gossip Girl and move it to the 50s." • "theSkimm • The strange and fascinating relationship between Capote and his "swans" is wonderfully reimagined in this

engrossing novel • "Sara Gruen, New York Times bestselling author of *Water for Elephants*  
• Your next must-read book-club selection. • "Jamie Ford, New York Times bestselling author  
of *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

When Truman Capote published *La Cote Basque* 1965 (in 1975), it was much to the embarrassment and shame of a top tier group of NY Society women, formerly referred to by Truman Capote as his "Swans." The Swans were comprised of Barbara Paley, Slim Keith, C.Z. Guest, Maria Agnelli and Gloria Guinness (and several others). For a few decades – the 1950s to the 1970s – these were the "IT" girls. You didn't mess with them. That is, unless you were Truman Capote on booze and drugs. There is a *Vanity Fair* article entitled, *Bye Society*, by Gerald Clarke, from 1988 that one can read online – just google it – that is very informative as this story goes. For many years, Truman Capote ingratiated himself into the lives of these women, who loved and adored him and who trusted him with all of their many secrets and private circumstances. His later downward spiral following years of obsessive focus on *In Cold Blood*, a time that included

enough alcohol and drugs to choke a horse, resulted in his somewhat unethical betrayal of the Swans right there on the pages of Esquire, for all the world to see. Truman was especially close to Barbara "Babe" Paley, the glamorous wife of CBS executive, Bill Paley, and much of this novel has to do with this central relationship. In a way, Truman and Babe were soulmate friends who sincerely adored and understood each other's frailties. Truman was welcomed into Babe's life as well as the other ladies' lives, complete with a constant flow of invitations to their magnificent houses and yachts and gifts of extravagant luxuries. Even as a relatively young and unknown writer, he was accepted into influential circles, meeting people and celebrities he wouldn't have otherwise. As his fame grew and his talent recognized, he changed. And not for the better. With an overindulgence of drugs and drink, he became unable to focus on another book the magnitude of *In Cold Blood*. Instead, he penned *La Cote Basque* 1965 (in 1975) and betrayed his beloved Babe and the rest of the Swans. The results were quite shattering for most of the group. As the Vanity Fair article states, he committed Social Suicide. Big time. This novel is based on facts but does fill in some of the blanks with literary fiction, which includes a sufficient amount of juicy, catty, backstabbing dialogue. We learn a lot about Truman's personal life, his mother issues, his longing for fame and notoriety and his downward spiral into that Social Suicide. The funny thing is that when you think about this type of thing in today's media environment, the fallout would be minimal. Back then it was devastating. I read this back to back with a small book of Truman Capote's early stories that is just being released. It was a nice companion, thinking about Truman's relationships and lifestyle. Well written and researched. Recommend.

If you are interested in that certain strange time in the 60's when everything was changing but still kind of innocent you'll enjoy this book. If you are a fan of the blistering talent that was Truman Capote you may not live it, though I did. I learned a lot about the context of his life, and even though much of it was embellished with poetic license it was kinda juicy and gossipy and interesting but not in a terrible way. It gave the view of the swans which is a hard one to grasp but the author did a good job. Again she is a charming writer and never makes the claim that this is all 100percent accurate. Many things that I was interested in were explained. The description of the black and white ball and all the stuff leading up to it was so fun to read about. I've read all of the other bios on Mr Capote and this is not bad at all and delightfully entertaining.

**\*\*SPOILER ALERT\*\*** What a beautiful fairy tale, almost *the* one used as bookends in the Swans of Fifth Avenue *actually* more like a Grimm's fairy tale than one by Hans

Christian Anderson. Glamour, luxury, extravagance and presumed friendship are the surface story. Running under that is another. Boredom. The author tips her hand, while like Shakespeare, she allows a character to give the clue. This when Truman gives Babe a reading list, on it Madame Bovary is underlined twice. Is Benjamin hinting for the reader also to think of the novel Madame Bovary? This bears some significance because the similarities between Babe and Emma Bovary are hard to ignore. Both are women in a marriage of convenience and security, both with little romance. Both experience the sinkhole of boredom fought with overindulgence, self gratification, and a grasping for adoration. All of this escalates to tragedy for each. Further, compare Flaubert's usage of words on Emma's death with Melanie Benjamin's on Babe's death. Both use a similarly passionless tone in just one simple sentence. A sentence that contains precisely six syllables. Since this is a novel, with conversations and thoughts of the author's invention, the reader's impossible task may well be to sort fact from opinion. Or more realistically, to simply read for entertainment without remembering and quoting the contents as Truth.

Melanie Benjamin writes a juicy story about Truman Capote's betrayal of his high society New York lady friends. Based on a true story, Ms. Benjamin hypes the truth by writing in a very gossipy, extravagant style. She brought to life, a somewhat bygone era and highlighted the superficiality of the times. An accidental meeting of Truman Capote and William and Babe Paley leads to his introduction into society. His flamboyant style endears him to Babe Paley and, subsequently, many of her friends. They all confide in him, particularly Babe, telling him things about their personal lives that they would not dare share with anyone else. Subsequently, after the wild success of *In Cold Blood*, Truman is searching for his next blockbuster book. After a very dry period, where Truman capitalizes on his fame and revels in all the excesses that fame can bring, he decides to write a book, revealing the private lives of his high society friend, thinly disguised as fiction. When the first installment is released, via a magazine story, his friends quickly recognize his betrayal. The story follows their subsequent reaction and finally, the final downfall of Mr. Capote. While I enjoyed the book to a certain degree, I became somewhat disinterested in most of the specific characters.

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